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SUBJECT: MIDNIGHT EXPRESS IT'S NOT: MODEL TURKISH PRISON  
SHOWCASES JUSTICE SECTOR REFORM

1.(SBU) Summary: GOT and EU officials inaugurated Turkey's second "model prison" on February 8 in the western town of Usak. The GOT overhauled the medium security facility where violent riots killed four during the 1990s as part of a 10.7 million Euro EU-funded Judicial Modernization and Penal Reform Program. The three-year project transformed the crumbling facility where inmates previously lived together in large "wards" into a solid structure with a calming pastel-colored interior, clean four-person cells, a library, gym, medical center, and educational and vocational training rooms. Turkey's Director General of Prisons Kenan Ipek declared at the opening that the GOT is poised to implement this rehabilitative model in prisons throughout Turkey. Although human rights contacts maintain that Turkey's prison system remains imperfect, the Usak project shows that with EU assistance, Turkey can effectively overhaul its more antiquated institutions when it is determined to do so. The GOT's rapid transformation of some of its most violent and decrepit prisons into paradigms of modern rehabilitative punishment remains one of its unsung success stories. End summary.

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GOT Transforms "Riot Prison" to "Model Prison"  
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2.(U) On February 8, the Ministry of Justice and EU Delegation to Turkey jointly inaugurated Turkey's second "model prison" in Usak, located in Western Turkey. The medium security, or E-type prison, has a capacity of 501 inmates and currently houses, in separate quarters, several hundred men, twenty women, and twelve under-18 boys. The effort is parthllfter a series of bloody rioQs during the 1990s in which five people were killed, it had become a symbol of the sad state of Turkish detention facilities. The GOT hoped to erase images of past prisoner rebellions against staff, and show that it could turn a problematic facility into one fully in line with European standards.

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Prison's New Face: Pastel Pink and Soothing Yellow  
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3.(U) Slideshows at the opening ceremony and a two-hour walking tour through most of the prison highlighted the differences between past and present: Dark, crumbling

buildings had been turned into solid structures painted with pastel colors chosen for their calming effect on inmates. Large wards where hundreds of prisoners lived together, and that led to gang violence, became three or four person cells.

Barren, unused rooms were turned into a library with thousands of books, modern gym facilities, and education and vocational training rooms. Decrepit medical rooms were turned into hygienic dental and medical examination and treatment rooms.

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Renovation More Than Physical  
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4.(U) The aim of the project was not only to improve physical conditions in the prison but to educate the staff in modern prison administration methods, Ipek told us during the tour. The project organized training programs for the prison staff to improve dialogue among themselves and with detainees. From prison directors to guards, all staff attended the Council of Europe-led classes covering areas such as human rights, conflict management, anger management and behavioral science. Over three years, European Council and MOJ officials worked to implement eight different training programs to educate the 200 prison staff on modern prison administration methods.

5.(U) During our tour we observed another important element

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of the program -- educational and vocational training programs for detainees. Over 75 per cent of inmates take part in training workshops where they can learn skills in hairdressing, auto shop, textile weaving, plumbing, computers, electrical- preparing detainees for release. They had further helped decrease annual disciplinary cases to 12 from over one hundred the previous year.

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The Challenge: Implementing the Model Throughout Turkey  
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6.(U) EC delegation Justice Section Head Michael Vogele pressed the GOT to continue to modernize its prisons as part of the overall strategy of justice reform. During his inauguration speech, Vogele said that many Turkish prisons remain overcrowded and under-resourced. The EU stands ready to assist in the challenge. DG Ipek said Turkey would rise to the challenge. The MOJ has now trained over 18,000 of its prison staff at its four training centers, and will continue to collaborate with other ministries, the EU, local NGOs until all prison staff are properly trained.

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Human Rights Observers Cautiously Optimistic  
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7.(SBU) Human rights contacts welcome the advancements the Usak model prison represents, but cautioned that prison conditions remain inconsistent throughout the country. Human Rights Association President Yusuf Alatas told us that the worst problems, such as physical torture, have nearly ceased.

However, the physical conditions of prisons are still very bad in much of the country, vocational training opportunities are rare, and prison staff usually do not receive training in the humane treatment of inmates, according to Alatas. He remained cautiously optimistic that the EU accession process would help spur the GOT to continue momentum on prison reform. Izmir Human Rights attorney Nalan Erkem told us that the main problem is that prisons are not open to civil monitoring by domestic organizations. The GOT's "prison monitoring boards" are comprised mostly of government officials, are toothless, and ultimately ineffective. The GOT continues to show off its handful of model facilities to foreigners while it keeps all other prisons closed off.

8.(SBU) Comment: The Usak model prison projects highlights the tremendous progress Turkey has made in improving human rights since it stepped up the pace of its EU harmonization efforts in 2004. It also illustrates what Turkey can accomplish when it works determinedly and collaboratively to transform its more antiquated institutions. While human rights observers correctly point out that more transparency is still needed, Turkey's rapid transformation of some of its most violent, decrepit, and overcrowded prisons into paradigms of modern rehabilitation at <http://www.state.gov/p/eur/ankara/>

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